Conference on Disarmament

12 March 2015
English
Original: French

Letter dated 10 March 2015 from the Permanent Representative of France to the Conference on Disarmament addressed to the Acting Secretary-General of the Conference transmitting the statement made by the President of France, Mr. François Hollande, in Istres, France, on 19 February 2015

I have the honour to transmit to you the statement made by the President of France, Mr. François Hollande, in Istres, France, on 19 February 2015.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and the annexed statement circulated as an official document of the Conference on Disarmament.

(*Signed*) Jean-Hughes **Simon-Michel**
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to the Conference on Disarmament

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Visit of Mr. François Hollande, President of the Republic, to the strategic air forces in Istres, France, on 19 February 2015

Statement on nuclear deterrence

1. I am at the Istres military base, an airbase. You, the Air Force, are welcoming me today and I would like to take this occasion to pay tribute to the pilots, navigators and mechanics who lost their lives or sustained severe injuries less than a month ago in the terrible accident that occurred in Spain, in Albacete.

2. Once again, our armed forces have paid a heavy price for the security of our country. I would like once more to pay tribute to the military personnel who devote themselves to the independence of France.

3. That is the very reason for my visit here.

4. Every day, the Air Force demonstrates its ability to protect French territory against potential raids from the sky. The Air Force is also capable of deploying powerful means, far from metropolitan France, for field operations. It is one of the responses that we have, in keeping with the role and commitments which we have taken on, in the fight against terrorism. The Air Force can strike hostile targets, as it does in Iraq or the Sahel region. Lastly, the Air Force has a role to play in nuclear deterrence, and this is the focus of the speech that I wish to deliver before you today.

5. I belong to a generation that had the incalculable good fortune not to have experienced war on its country's soil. My father and my grandfather lived through war, indeed wars. As I was born in the early 1950s, I had the immense good fortune of being spared these conflicts. Yet, what has been happening in Eastern Europe over the past year reminds us that peace must never be taken for granted.

6. Similarly, the arms race has resumed in a number of regions around the world, along with a significant and rapid increase in military spending and arsenals, against a backdrop of rising tensions. Some countries are investing in technologies that could upset current strategic balances. Several have even embarked on a course involving threats or pressure on neighbouring land and maritime territory.

7. Therefore. and I do not say this lightly, the possibility of a conflict arising between States that affects us directly or indirectly cannot be ruled out. In the military nuclear field, new powers have appeared over the past 20 years, and others are seeking to emerge. States that possess nuclear weapons and have thus far asserted the urgent need for disarmament have, in point of fact, increased their capacity with the development of new nuclear components or continue to produce fissile material for nuclear weapons.

8. At the same time, tactical arsenals have been growing, giving rise to concerns that the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons has been lowered. What should France do against such a backdrop? It should continue making its call for a safer world: that is what French diplomacy does. But France must be clear-sighted. It is aware that it is not enough to issue calls for immediate and total nuclear disarmament: the words and deeds of each and every one of us must be consistent.

9. France has therefore decided to tackle one of the most serious threats to global stability: the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

10. Any increase in the number of nuclear-weapon States is a major risk to peace, primarily in the regions concerned, but also for international security.

11. This is the thrust of the position that we have adopted for the past several months, if not years, in negotiations with Iran. If I had to sum up what we expect from these negotiations, it would be very simple: yes to non-military nuclear energy, no to nuclear weapons. The problem is that, for the time being, Iran has not demonstrated that it wishes to give up nuclear weapons. But once it does so, an agreement will have been reached.

12. North Korea, for its part, carried out a third nuclear test two years ago. This is both unacceptable and alarming.

13. But not only is there nuclear proliferation, there is also a proliferation of chemical and biological weapons and the means to deliver them.

14. In Syria, a basic taboo in our collective security system was broken in the summer of 2013 when the regime of Bashar al-Assad used chemical weapons against his own population. It was only when faced with the threat of the use of force that action began on the destruction of the chemical weapon stockpiles and factories declared by the regime of Bashar al-Assad.

15. That process is now over. But I am not entirely convinced, because there are still some grey areas and it is highly likely that bombs containing chlorine were dropped on Syrian villages less than a year ago.

16. Proliferation is a global threat and thus a threat also to France.

17. Admittedly, France does not feel directly threatened — it has no declared enemy — but as I mentioned earlier, over the last 12 months we have witnessed the Ukraine crisis, the rise to power of Daesh and the cyber-attack, unprecedented in scale, on Sony. Surprises, indeed upheavals, are possible. And the reappearance of a major State threat to our country cannot be excluded.

18. It is thus my absolute duty as Head of State to take these threats into account, because nothing must undermine our independence. The current state of international affairs allows no leeway for weakness. The time for nuclear deterrence is therefore not over. There can be no question of lowering our guard, including in this area.

19. It bears repeating: this is my responsibility as President of the Republic and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

20. As President François Mitterrand once said, the Head of State is France's first citizen to have his say and to take a decision.

21. Nuclear deterrence protects our country from any assault on its vital interests mounted by a State, no matter where it may come from or what shape it takes. I would add that, for France, nuclear weapons are not intended to gain any advantage in a conflict. Because of the devastating effects of nuclear weapons, they have no place in offensive strategies. They are designed for defensive strategies only.

22. Deterrence is also what enables us to maintain our freedom to act and make decisions under any circumstances, because it is deterrence that makes it possible to stave off any threat of blackmail from a State that might seek to paralyse us.

23. France is one of the few countries in the world whose influence and responsibility are in fact global in scale. Because France is able to shoulder its responsibilities. Because it is well known that when France speaks out, it can put its words into action. And deterrent forces make it possible to ensure that the international commitments undertaken by France will always be honoured even if the use of nuclear weapons is conceivable only in an extreme circumstance of legitimate self-defence.

24. Our nuclear forces must be capable of crippling an enemy's centres of power – its vital political, economic and military centres.

25. It is the ultimate responsibility of the President of the Republic to continuously assess the nature of our vital interests and the potential threats to them.

26. The integrity of our territory and the protection of our people lie at the heart of our vital interests. Whatever the means used by an enemy State we must protect the ability of our nation to survive. This is the meaning of nuclear deterrence.

27. However, I cannot rule out the possibility that an enemy might misjudge the bounds of our vital interests. That is why I wish to recall here that France can, as a last resort, show its intention to defend its vital interests by sending a nuclear warning for the purpose of restoring deterrence.

28. The definition of our vital interests cannot be limited to the national level, because France does not view its defence strategy in isolation, even in the nuclear domain. We have affirmed this view on numerous occasions, together with the United Kingdom, with which we enjoy unequalled cooperation. We participate in the European project; we have built a community for the future with our partners; the existence of a French nuclear deterrent makes a major and essential contribution to Europe. In addition, France and its European partners have a sense of real, heartfelt solidarity. Who, therefore, could believe that an attack that would threaten the survival of Europe would have no consequences?

29. This is why our discussion goes hand in hand with steadfast shoring up of a joint European defence project. But our deterrence belongs to us in our own right; it is we who decide and it is we who assess our vital interests.

30. I also wish to clarify our relationship with a number of States which, as parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, have called for safeguards against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. This is a legitimate desire. France made a unilateral declaration that in no way undermines the right to self-defence, of which the Security Council took note in 1995. France has confirmed the commitments that it has made with respect to nuclear-weapon-free zones in various parts of the world. It was necessary to do so.

31. Today, I solemnly reaffirm that France will not use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States that are parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and that observe their international obligations involving the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

32. I also wish to clarify our relationship with NATO. The North Atlantic Alliance has a nuclear mission, and independent strategic forces, such as those of France and the United Kingdom, have a specific role to play in global deterrence.

33. This conclusion, drawn by all, does not change the position of our country. France does not participate in the nuclear planning mechanisms of NATO and France will not participate in those mechanisms. This principle will stand. However, France wishes to take part in formulating NATO nuclear policy. All members of NATO must show consistency and resolve in this undertaking.

34. That, ladies and gentlemen, is what I wished to say about the rationale underlying our deterrence policy.

35. I would now like to turn to the means that make it possible to achieve and maintain deterrence. More than 50 years ago, pursuant to a presidential decree which established the Strategic Air Forces, a Mirage IV aircraft armed with a nuclear bomb was put on alert for the first time. Continuous nuclear deterrence has been ensured by our forces ever since that decisive act, every day, every hour, without exception. I wish to commend the troops and civilians who ensure that our deterrence is credible and thus our fellow citizens are safe.

36. By definition, deterrence is practised on a continuous basis. What kind of deterrent would sporadic deterrence be? True, the world has greatly changed over the past 50 years, as have our forces. To ensure continuous deterrence, we have had to adapt the forces

continuously, with respect to both their capacity and levels, to the emergence of potential threats to our nation.

37. France thus opted, in 1996, to do away with one of its components, the surface-to-surface component, by closing down the Albion plateau launching sites and dismantling short-range missiles. We have maintained two components, one air-based, the other sea-based. This has not precluded us from reducing the size of our forces, to keep them at the level of strict sufficiency.

38. Strict sufficiency is the principle underlying the structure of our nuclear deterrent.

39. There are those who regularly raise concerns about the maintenance of the two components and call into question the test simulation programme or the need for the continuous at-sea deterrent of our ballistic missile submarines. Such discussion is legitimate in a democratic society, and I do not wish to brush it aside. But we also need to be able to justify our choices and therefore to review on a regular basis what is required for deterrence.

40. As far as I am concerned, I make decisions based on the only issue at stake: the ultimate security of France. I have therefore decided to maintain a seaborne component and an airborne component. Neither of them has been entrusted with fulfilling an objective on its own. Both work towards all the tasks involved in deterrence and it is their complementary nature that makes it possible for the Head of State to have at all times a range of necessary and sufficient options so as never to be dependent on a single means of deterrence.

41. Allow me to explain. Given our submarines' continuous patrols at sea, invulnerability and missile range, the seaborne component constitutes a key element of deterrent manoeuvres. Any aggressor tempted to blackmail France must be certain that response capacity is always ready for use and that the aggressor will be unable to either detect or destroy it. That is the whole point of the seaborne component.

42. The airborne component also ensures continuous deterrence through the strategic air forces. At their side, the nuclear naval-air force, based on the *Charles de Gaulle* aircraft carrier, affords other courses of action. In the event of a major crisis, the airborne component is a visible manifestation of our determination to defend ourselves, preventing escalation to extreme measures. If I can put it thus, one of the components is for all to see, the other is invisible: this is where their value lies.

43. There is also a need to maintain the capacity and credibility of these two components. That implies practical implementation, including weapons and technological advances in air defence, missile defence and submarine detection.

44. The defence spending legislation will allow us to continue retrofitting our ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) to the M51 missiles, which will allow us to deploy the new seaborne nuclear warhead beginning in 2016, to launch studies on a third generation of SSBNs and to replace, by 2018, the last Mirage 2000N with Rafale fighters that carry improved medium-range air-to-surface missiles (ASMPA). Moreover, the spending legislation provides for renewing the fleet of tanker aircraft: 12 Phénix planes have been ordered, with the first 2 due for delivery in 2018.

45. The defence spending legislation thus aimed to prepare for, adapt and make good on the commitments that I made to ensure that our deterrents are reliable and safe. Again, it is my responsibility to look ahead and to prepare for the long term, namely the renewal of our components. What gives the policies of the Head of State meaning is not simply preparing to confront the potential threats facing us today; it is also ensuring, well after the President has left office and is replaced by another, that continuity is maintained in the country: a chain that may not be broken as adjustments are made to our forces for the sake of deterrence.

46. That is why I have also made sure, when it comes to the seaborne component, to embark on further adjustments to the M51 missile so that the tonnage of future submarines stays very close to that of our Triomphant-class submarines. There have also been studies to look into what might succeed the ASMPA missile. The most sophisticated technologies will be applied in particular so that materials will be even more effective in terms of speed and stealth.

47. I have also instructed the atomic energy authority to make the necessary arrangements for our warheads before the end of the nuclear weapons life cycle. Then there is the task of renewing weapons without carrying out nuclear tests. That is why we have a simulation programme, which is fully in keeping with the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

48. In this area, too, I would like to solemnly reaffirm our commitments. France does not and will not produce new types of nuclear weapons. I would therefore like to commend the efforts made to meet the great scientific and technical challenge that the simulation programme represents. The military applications division of the French Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission has met all the deadlines for this project while keeping within budget.

49. Last year, 2014, saw the first experiments with the Megajoule laser at the Epure testing facility. Again, for this simulation programme, which is essential to prepare for the future, we are working in collaboration with the United Kingdom. We are committed to such strategic cooperation for a period of at least 50 years, by sharing two simulation facilities, one in France, the other in the United Kingdom. We will soon be unveiling our initial results, less than five years since the signing of the Lancaster House Treaties, which will be yet another opportunity to commend all the efforts that have been made.

50. I have heard it said that the budget for nuclear deterrence has purportedly been spared the spending cuts faced by the armed forces. As if to say holding some sort of "competition" between defence services was something to be desired. As if seeing to it that our ability to maintain a deterrent would be in conflict with other missions entrusted to our armed forces. I would like, therefore, to address these points.

51. There are budget constraints on all spending, including military spending on the armed forces and weapons. Nevertheless, the necessary outlays on both nuclear deterrents and conventional weapons have been ring-fenced under the defence spending legislation. The persons responsible for overseeing spending related to deterrents have had to be pragmatic, as have others, but have never had to compromise on credibility, autonomy and reliability when it comes to the survival and sovereignty of France through deterrents.

52. But I would like to make another point. Nuclear deterrence complements our conventional forces and has a knock-on effect on the whole of our defence system. In other words, some of the means that play a role in deterrence are directly used for our conventional or standard operations. I am thinking here of intelligence satellites, fighter aircraft, tanker aircraft, nuclear attack submarines, anti-submarine frigates and mine-hunters.

53. I would like to give another example. The fighters of the Strategic Air Forces have what is called dual capabilities. These aircraft carried out about a quarter of the strikes during operations in Libya and the Sahel region. These dual-capacity aircraft are currently deployed in Africa and Iraq and play a part every day in air defence warning.

54. Lastly, deterrence stimulates our research and development efforts and promotes the excellence and competitiveness of our industry. Innovations have occurred because research has been carried out. It is because we have been able to maintain the highest level of nuclear deterrence possible that we have been able to spread throughout the industrial

sector the know-how and leading-edge technologies that have been at the service of the economy and have thus generated employment.

55. However, military spending cannot be justified simply by the desire to stimulate the economy or create employment. Military spending must be based on the stakes being played for, i.e., the security of France, the defence of our interests, the promotion of our values, in short what it is that makes us France.

56. Defence and security are not like any other responsibility. They entail not simply an investment, even if it may seem as such. They are what allows us to be free.

57. In a dangerous world, and our world is dangerous, France will not let down its guard. However, while it is prepared to defend itself, it does not wish to give up the goal of disarmament, including nuclear disarmament. France is a peace power, and that is why it defends itself, for the sake of peace. France is what is known as a nuclear-weapon State within the meaning of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, that is to say, we are recognized as a State that possesses nuclear weapons. And this circumstance comes with special responsibilities. I therefore support the long-term goal of total elimination of nuclear weapons but, I must add, when the strategic context is ripe. France will continue to work tirelessly towards this end. It will do so in a steadfast, transparent, truthful and, I might add, wise manner and in close cooperation with its allies.

58. Nuclear disarmament cannot be a magic formula or even a call to action. It must be demonstrated, above all by the State that calls for it. France has been exemplary, in accordance with the principle of strict sufficiency. It has thus reduced the total number of weapons by half in recent years. By half! It has reduced its airborne nuclear component by a third. It has given up surface-to-surface missiles. We have not paid lip service to disarmament; we have carried it out to the fullest extent necessary. France has been exemplary in terms of irreversibility. It did not content itself with just ceasing its nuclear tests; it also stopped uranium and plutonium production for nuclear weapons. It has fully dismantled the relevant production facilities and now bases its deterrent on a limited stock of nuclear material. France has been exemplary as far as the size of its nuclear stockpiles is concerned, which stand at 300 warheads. Why 300? Because this number corresponds to our assessment of the strategic context.

59. If the level of other arsenals, particularly those of Russia and the United States, were to one day drop to a few hundred weapons, France would respond accordingly, as it has always done. But today we are still a long way from there.

60. I would like to expound on our doctrine with even greater transparency, which is what I am doing today, before you, and therefore before the entire world transparency about our arsenals and our specific disarmament efforts. That is why I am not afraid to say that France has three sets of 16 submarine-borne missiles and 54 ASMPA1 delivery systems. And I would like all nuclear-weapon States to make the same effort at the truth, as I am making before you, for all categories of weapons in their nuclear arsenal.

61. In the same spirit of transparency and truthfulness, France will shortly visit new sites that no longer harbour nuclear weapons, including on the Albion plateau, where the silos that housed the surface-to-surface component are completely dismantled, and the Luxeuil base, where the weapons storage depots are now empty. Once again, I hope that this gesture will encourage other nuclear powers to follow suit, to allow for visits, which our experts would gladly take part in.

62. It is also important to declare a moratorium on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and to dismantle the facilities that produce this material and nuclear test sites. France once again encourages all countries with nuclear weapons to take all these steps as well.

63. Lastly, the diplomatic machinery of France, the foreign policy of France, will continue to rally around the cause of disarmament, particularly in the run-up to the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in a few weeks' time. Our first priority, within that forum, remains the earliest possible entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. I say this without hesitation, as France has shown that renouncing nuclear tests in a complete and irreversible manner has been compatible with maintaining a credible deterrent. And this message should be conveyed to all our partners.

64. Our second priority is to end the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons definitively. This topic has been discussed for years, but negotiations have not yet got off the ground because no agreement has been reached between the principal States concerned. I therefore call on all nuclear-weapon States to enter into talks on the complete cessation of production of fissile material. France will be putting forward an ambitious, realistic and verifiable draft treaty on the subject in the coming weeks.

65. I was eager to come to Istres to engage in this exercise in truth-telling and transparency and, at the same time, to set out what deterrence means for France. To reaffirm the fundamental importance of nuclear deterrence for the security of France. It is not the whole defence policy. It complements the work that we must accomplish in all areas to protect our territory, to carry out overseas operations, to promote what we stand for and to combat terrorism from any quarter.

66. Maintaining a credible deterrent requires thoroughness and professionalism of the highest order, which is something that you have shown, as you have carried the demand for high quality, know-how and mastery of the most sensitive technologies in the specific exercises that you perform to perfection. That is why I wish to convey that you have the complete trust of our country. The entire nation knows what it owes to you, what it owes to deterrents, and thus shows its gratitude. For what you do, what deterrents allow for, is to provide a nation, France, your country, with something that is most dear, precious and essential, namely its independence. And there can be no independence if there is no freedom to determine its destiny. Deterrents are what give us the ability to live in freedom and to convey our message throughout the world without any fear or concern, because we are certain that we have the ability to defend ourselves.

67. Independence, freedom, the ability to assert our values: this is why we must ensure every day that nuclear deterrence is uninterrupted and be able at all times to further enhance our deterrent posture with better organization, operations and weapons. *Vive la République et vive la France!*